

Kunapipi

Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 18

1984

The year that was

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Recommended Citation

MacLeod, Mark; Brydon, Diana; Garrett, Simon; Hashmi, Alamgir; and Chapman, Michael, The year that was, *Kunapipi*, 6(1), 1984.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol6/iss1/18>

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The year that was

Abstract

Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa

The Year That Was

AUSTRALIA

With three of her (now seven) books published in 1983, it's Elizabeth Jolley's year: two novels, *Mr Scobie's Riddle* (Penguin) and *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* (UQP) and a book of short fiction, *Woman in a Lampshade* (Penguin).

There's been a tendency to dismiss Jolley as a pleasant, naïve realist, a kind of 'found' object whose name and much-repeated byline tend to support this little myth: 'Born in the industrial Midlands of England in 1923 Elizabeth Jolley was brought up in a German-speaking household — her father having met her mother, the daughter of an Austrian general, when engaged on famine relief in Vienna in 1919. She was educated at home and later at a Quaker boarding school.'

No mention of a university degree or job. Elizabeth Jolley is obviously some new version of a Good Bloke, in a dress.

But she's much more than that. Her offbeat treatment of such subjects as a nursing home, love between women, rituals of growing and killing, and the sexuality of the aged, her obsessive reworking of a particular image, character or situation from one book to another, open up the process of her fiction and give her work its unique energy.

Elizabeth Jolley may become a major writer. She is also very funny, but as we've seen before in Australian literature that probably means that she will not be taken seriously.

Two other novels not to be missed. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (Virago) is an extraordinary anti-utopian vision of a future Australia, published here with what often seem surprising passages censored from the original text for political reasons before its first publication in 1947, and the third 'Tomorrow' of its title now restored.

And David Foster's new novel *Plumbum* (Penguin). Don't be put off by the aggressive awkwardness of the title. Latin for 'lead', it's a great name for a rock band in the Heavy Metal Age and points to the novel's focus on unexpected juxtapositions. Those interested in the treatment of Asia in Australian writing will be drawn to one of the best episodes in the book

which has the raunchy and ephemeral world of Australian rock brought up against Bangkok and Calcutta and explored as a way of seeing. It's a post-Beatles trip to India that goes beyond exotic travelogue writing and copes quite well with the difficult ambivalence of Shiva and what it represents.

Foster's satiric facility is clear in his picture of Sydney: 'Walking and driving round some of the most beautiful harbourside suburbs in the world is a population dumbfounded by its own lack of importance.' And yet *Plumbum* takes a well-worn target for satire, the national capital Canberra, and gives it the best of the mere handful of literary treatments that are not dismissive.

Sadly, Kylie Tennant's new novel *Tantavallon* (Macmillan) fails to do that for either its Sydney setting or its main concern, conservation.

The second novel by poet Peter Kocan, *The Cure* (A&R) is the sequel to his novel of prison life, *The Treatment*. Its stark telling is only briefly marred by the cliché cameo appearance of a gay poet, and is a welcome counterbalance to the lush slowness of recent novels by writers who are better known for their poetry.

In poetry, the year's best book is *The People's Otherworld* (A&R) by Les Murray. There's an attractive metaphysical wit here in poems to his shower, 'that toga worn on either or both shoulders', and his bed, 'Homage to the Launching Place'; and it's good to have collected familiar poems from recent years such as the poem to his double, 'Quintets for Robert Morley'. A poem will stretch Murray's dense and long line to its likely limit and be followed by a meditation on 'The Quality of Sprawl'. *The People's Otherworld* is clearly Murray's most playful book.

But the painfully blunt, short lines of 'Three Poems in Memory of My Mother' are new. Their confrontation with an aspect of autobiography conspicuously unspoken until now is strangely moving.

Nigel Roberts's *Steps for Astaire* (Hale & Iremonger) is the other outstanding collection of poetry this year. Roberts is a poet who feels no urgency to publish, partly because of his interest in poetry as performance, and this is only his second book though he has been an influential poet in Sydney for many years. And like his first, *In Casablanca for the Waters*, it's a good one. I don't know whether he wrote his own dustjacket notes or not, but they convey the book's pace and humour well: 'Again he is the journalist of the id, the desperate reporter getting the facts, sending off despatches from the front — Balmain, San Francisco, Hollywood, and the various check-in points along the way. Some of his new poems sound like the thin tones of people talking long-distance, phone

calls with many voices on the line. Others are like reading love letters punched out by telex.' Get this book before it goes — fast!

Geoff Page's fifth collection, *Clairvoyant in Autumn* (A&R) throughout is laconic in its evocation of a rural Australia on the edges of Canberra, 'our city' one poem says, 'where no one's ever seen on foot'. This is very much a poetry of place. The unreality of invented cities, ghost towns, photographs of past wars and relations, early morning mists and sharp frosts seems to move Page's work from quiet strength to strength.

Mark O'Connor's *The Fiesta of Men* (H&I) reflects the divided world of his imagination. The poems about Europe are still technically assured, erudite, precise in their observation, but quite lifeless. O'Connor is a passionate and energetic poet and the Europe of these poems is a dead place of his learning, quite unresponsive to him. But under the ocean and along the Great Barrier Reef he is a different poet. The opening of papaya is more sexual than any Lawrentian fig; immersion in the undersea world of 'The Diver' is a keenly observed submission to the feminine; again his natural affinity with North Queensland is clear in 'Planting the Dunk Botanic Gardens'. Mark O'Connor will probably tire of reviewers saying it, but his real strength is his 'Muse a thousand miles long'.

Tom Shapcott has published prose poems and novels in recent years, but *Welcome!* (UQP) is a strong collection of his poetry since the *Selected Poems* in 1978: strong because of the variety the collection offers and the changes it represents. The poems here are dramatic, often impersonating unnamed voices. The book travels widely and tends to give an impression of speed, and yet many of the poems are about the aged and lonely. Its final lines are characteristic: 'It was your own blood/ in the snow./ Welcome!'

Other outstanding individual collections are Dimitris Tsaloumas's *The Observatory* (UQP) which, coming as it does from a non Anglo-Celtic Australia, challenges established notions of 'Australian Literature'; and Philip Salom's *The Projectionist* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press). And then there's the year's controversial anthology (everybody's doing it): *The Younger Australian Poets* (H&I). Besides unwisely giving such generous selections from their own poetry, the editors Robert Gray and Geoffrey Lehmann have included few women poets (6 out of 29?), have given poets like Robert Adamson and John Tranter meagre and unrepresentative selections which can only expose the real nature of their editorial claim to objectivity and the criterion of excellence, and by cooking the concept of 'Younger' they manage to include Les Murray and exclude older but 'newer' poets such as Fay Zwicky.

Not *the* anthology of Australian poetry (why does every anthology claim to be that?) but one to add to the argument, I suppose.

It's been a good year for short fiction. Beverley Farmer's *Milk* (Penguin) is the best treatment of Greeks and Australians since Patrick White's *The Burnt Ones*. The emphasis in her portrait of women here is on the maternal. Farmer's technique is not innovative but her eye for detail constantly surprises and pleases.

Barry Hill's *Headlocks and Other Stories* (McPhee Gribble) appears similarly conservative but its analysis of masculinity and the suburban gothic images, developed in Hill's novel *Near the Refinery*, are distinctive. In the title story here, rough-house becomes nightmare when a boy wrestles his father's mate to death and then, helped by his father, heaps the mate's body onto a bonfire. The punch of such images, signified by the titles of the stories 'Headlocks', 'Sluts', 'Lizards', 'Albatross' (Hemingway out of Bryan Brown again!) is repeatedly placed against the insecurity of many of the male characters and their relationships with women.

Robert Drewe's *The Bodysurfers* (James Fraser) conveys similar insecurities but without the punch. This collection is timely in picking up one of the interesting questions of recent years, 'Where is the beach in Australian art?', and its healthy sales attest to its popularity, but the pieces are unsatisfying: ephemeral as dry sand on a windy day, but without the sting. There is nothing here with the depth of, say, Glenda Adams' beach story 'The Mothers Have Curly Hair'. I suspect that the essentially visual nature of beach culture will make the projected television adaptation of *The Bodysurfers* a certain success where the book wavers.

Over Here Harv! (Penguin) collects the stories Bruce Dawe wrote before he became known as one of Australia's most important poets. The narrator Joey Cassidy is a younger and more comic version of Lawson's reluctant poet Joe Wilson, who helped tune the various masculine voices of Dawe's poems. But the stories here stand alone too, evoking a 'fifties innocence better than anything else in our literature and, without the phony hindsight of America's *Happy Days* industry.

If the boyishness of men in Australian literature often seems to make their women into mothers, it's intriguing to place Dawe's book alongside another first collection of stories by a poet, Fay Zwicky's *Hostages* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press). The characteristic voice here is that of the mature woman: honest and sad in her maturity. Readers who enjoy the vigorous musical quality of Zwicky's poetry may regret its absence here, except in the stories which are more adventurous in style. But the loss of

the music is amply compensated for by the unflinching exposure of guilt and delusion.

A reprint of Shirley Hazzard's *People in Glass Houses* (Penguin) together with reprints of her early novels shows where *The Transit of Venus* is coming from, and enhances its stature.

And finally Frank Moorhouse's short fiction anthology, *The State of the Art* (Penguin). Claiming to 'represent the burning edge of the art form', the selection is occasionally led astray by its more doubtful claim to 'look at the state of the art of living in Australia' (which means when it comes to sex for instance, you look for the lesbian story, the drag queen story, and so on). The exclusion of some established short fiction writers (Hal Porter, Dal Stevens, Thea Astley) on the grounds that they are well represented elsewhere and not others equally well represented elsewhere (Peter Carey, Murray Bail, Frank Moorhouse) is questionable, as is the exclusion of writers such as Glenda Adams on the tired old grounds of her non-Australian residence. Generally though, it's a good anthology, and evidence again that Penguin is the leading publisher of Australian writing.

And finally, a better year for the publication of new Australian plays. Aboriginal poet Jack Davis's *Kullark and The Dreamers* (Currency) is more difficult in script form than in production because of the use of dialect words and the reader's compulsion to keep consulting the glossary. Clem Gorman's *A Night in the Arms of Raelen* (Currency) takes up a narrower range of concerns than Williamson's early play *Don's Party*, but examines them more closely.

And two plays by new writers. Michael Gow's *The Kid* (Currency/Nimrod) focuses on young people from a NSW country town confronting the prospect of apocalypse in the city, with a challenging, though some have said pretentious, use of Wagnerian counterpoint. A play that breaks new ground in Australian drama, it didn't get the houses it deserved at its Sydney premiere: word seemed to get around that it was 'too depressing'.

Better attended, written with greater polish and pretensions, Justin Fleming's *The Cobra* (Sydney Theatre Company) attempts the difficult feat of telling the relationship between Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas from an ageing Bosie's point of view. It's a good example of the provincial view of the metropolitan that doesn't quite work. Bosie simply isn't interesting enough. It's still Wilde's story.

MARK MACLEOD

After years of novels exploring women's mid-life crisis, 1983 was the year of the male menopause. We've all known someone like Robert Harlow's Paul Nolan — middle-class, suburban, selfish, shallow. Written from Paul's perspective though not in his voice, *Paul Nolan* (McClelland & Stewart) reveals the emptiness of his existence with devastating accuracy. To focus so many words upon such an absence is a *tour de force* of a kind, but is this subject worth such attention? Rudy Wiebe's *My Lovely Enemy* (M & S) introduces a more complicated version of Paul: Dr James Dyck, History professor, is earnest, anguished, dimly aware of his failures to see, but inhibited from development by his adolescent fixation on sex. (His name indicates the source of his troubles.) When Christ miraculously appears to him in the library stacks, Dyck asks Him whether He ever had an erection! Even worse, Wiebe seems unaware of the superficiality of this concern, though he does bring Dyck to realize with shame 'his almost programmed banality' near the book's remarkably daring conclusion. Dyck's affair with a beautiful young graduate student triggers a novel that tries very hard to break down the barriers between male and female, physical and spiritual, realism and fantasy, but succeeds only in reminding us of how strong those barriers are — at least in the mind of the middle-aged Christian male.

Clark Blaise, in *Lusts* (Doubleday) approaches the problems of the middle-aged male obsessed with his sexual performance from a different angle, fusing it with a self-consciousness about writing and its deceptive relations with language and with reality so that it becomes a story as much about its own writing as about a man trying to grow up. It's a story we've read before, but Blaise does it with style. Robert Kroetsch's *Alibi* (Stoddart), a more obvious romp through metafictional territory, succeeds less well. Where Blaise's Richard Durgin looks backward, attempting to make sense of his wife Rachel's suicide in collaboration with her biographer Rosie Chang, Kroetsch's William William Dorfendorf lives resolutely in the present, seeking the ideal spa for his boss, the insatiable collector and millionaire Calgary oilman Deemer. Durgin's quest is nostalgic, inward and personal; Dorf's is all frenzied movement as if to deny the past and the self in the quest for immersion, in healing spa or woman. Male fantasies become more amusing in Leon Rooke's *Shakespeare's Dog* (M & S). Mr Hooker, the dog of the title, delights equally in bawdy romps and extravagant talk, claiming credit in his narration not only for getting the lad Shakespeare out of Stratford and off

to London but also for inspiring much of his work and proving along the way his contention that 'It ain't words ... but how they're shook'.

This tendency to involve historical characters in fictional narratives shapes several other noteworthy novels of the year. Susan Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* (Lester & Orpen, Dennys) traces the career of the Nova Scotian giantess Anna Swan, lesser known contemporary of Angus MacAskill. Anna tells her own story through journal entries, circus spiels, letters, newspaper accounts and testimonials from friends to build an amusing and suggestive work of some complexity. The story of this independent yet vulnerable giantess becomes the story of modern women in general and the story of Canada in relation to its entrepreneurial neighbour, the United States. Heather Robertsons' *Willy* (Lorimer), subtitled Volume One of *The King Years*, centres about another strong woman, Lily Coolican, who tells her version of the decade leading up to King's election as Prime Minister. Courted by two young men, Talbot Papineau and King, both grandsons of famous Canadian rebels and both obsessed with their mothers, Lily is in an ideal position to observe political events of the period from the marginalised perspective of a working-class woman at a time when Canadian women were still fighting for the vote. Funny, involving, contemporary, this is one of the most interesting novels of the year, even though once or twice it gave me the feeling of Can. lit. by number. Morley Callaghan turns further afield to re-write Biblical history in *A Time for Judas* (M & S), which attempts to rehabilitate the reputation of Judas through the purported discovery of hidden documents relating to the betrayal of Christ.

Other novels which focus on explicitly moral concerns are Stephen Vizinczey's *An Innocent Millionaire*, Janette Turner Hospital's *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit*, Brian Moore's *Cold Heaven* (all M&S) and David Helwig's *A Sound Like Laughter* (Stoddart), which completes his Kingston tetralogy in a darkly satiric vein that balances the lyricism and melodrama of the earlier *It Is Always Summer*.

A different Kingston comes to life in Matt Cohen's collection of stories, *Café Le Dog* (M&S). Although Atwood's a swimmer we keep expecting to break a record, since *Lady Oracle* she's done nothing but tread water. With her two new story collections this year, her head's still above water, but she's not going anywhere yet. *Murder in the Dark* (Coach House) contains scraps from the desk of an egotistical writer (you can call anything a prose poem and get away with it) and brilliantly comic comments on relations between the sexes. *Bluebeard's Egg* (M&S), a fatter book, is more conventional, but equally uneven. Some of these stories are

so good they recall Alice Munro, while others patronise their characters and settle for cheap tricks to manipulate their readers. Several other poets published fiction this year: Kristjanna Gunnars, *The Axe's Edge* (Porcepic), Elizabeth Brewster, *A House Full of Women* (Oberon), and David McFadden the expensive *Animal Spirits: Stories to Live By*, illustrated by Greg Curnoe (Coach House). University of Toronto Press brought out *A.M. Klein: Short Stories*, edited by M.W. Steinberg, and *First People, First Voices*, an anthology of native Indian writing edited by Penny Petrone. *The Oxford Book of French-Canadian Stories*, edited by Richard Teleky, provides a conventional survey of representative stories in translation.

Some of this year's poetry mirrored the fiction's narcissistic fascination with sex, most notably, Irving Layton's *The Gucci Bag*, David Donnell's *Settlements* (both M&S), and Dorothy Livesay's *The Phases of Love* (Coach House). Williams-Wallace published three interesting feminist poets: Betsy Warland's *A Gathering Instinct* and Gay Allison's *Life: Still* are uneven, but the transplanted Trinidadian Dionne Brand, who published two books this year — *Primitive Offensive* and *Winter Epigrams: Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia* — displays an impressive range and diversity. Jeni Couzyn's selected poems, *Life by Drowning* (Anansi), Sharon Thesen's new collection *Holding the Pose* (Coach House), Joe Rosenblatt's *Brides of the Stream* (Oolichan), and Don McKay's *Birding, or Desire* (M&S) each delights with the deployment of an individually realized voice. Christopher Dewdney's *Predators of the Adoration*, difficult, post-modernist poetry, was hailed as a brave choice for McClelland & Stewart's Modern Canadian Poets series. He is certainly a poet to watch.

After the welcome surprise of her first book, Erin Mouré's second, *Wanted Alive* (Anansi), proved a bit disappointing. Rosalind MacPhee's *What Place is This?*, Don Gutteridge's *God's Geography* (Brick) and Judith Fitzgerald's *Split Levels* display a variety of approaches to the long poem. Ralph Gustafson brought out *The Moment is All: Selected Poems 1944-83* (M&S), R.G. Everson, *Everson at Eighty* (Oberon), Fred Cogswell, *Selected Poems* (Guernica) and Raymond Souster the fourth volume of his *Collected Poems* (Oberon).

Three important writers died this year: Gabrielle Roy, Alden Nowlan, and Yves Thériault. Ken Dryden topped the best-seller lists while establishing a new high for sports autobiography with *The Game* (Macmillan).

Outstanding critical works included several from the University of British Columbia Press: *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System*, a collection of essays edited by Sherrill Grace and Lorraine Weir, *Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada* by Renate Usmiani,

Invocations: the Poetry and Prose of Gwendolyn MacEwen by Jan Bartley, and *An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke* by Lorraine McMullen. Marian Fowler's *Redney: A Life of Sara Jeannette Duncan* (Anansi) takes a less scholarly approach to the art of biography. *On F.R. Scott: Essays on his Contributions to Law, Literature, and Politics*, edited by Sandra Djwa and R. St. J. MacDonald (McGill-Queens) brings together conference papers that present a hagiographical portrait of one of our most versatile men of letters. Frank Davey's *Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature* (Turnstone) and Tom Wayman's *Inside Job: Essays on the New Work Writing* (Harbour) share a polemical approach to criticism if nothing else, demonstrating the range of the critical spectrum. *Modern English-Canadian Prose: A Guide to Information Sources*, edited by Helen Hoy (Gale), and *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, edited by William Toye, testify to our coming-of-age in the eyes of the outside world.

DIANA BRYDON

NEW ZEALAND

The first volume of autobiography from New Zealand's foremost living fiction writer was the highlight of the publishing year. *To the Is-land* (The Women's Press) is a vivid and evocative account by Janet Frame of her childhood and adolescence in Outram, Glenham, Edendale, Wyndham, and Oamaru, small towns of Southland and Otago to which her father's job with the railways took his family. It is a beautifully written story and gives a valuable insight into the background of Frame's early short stories and novels.

Frame's fictions are typically presented as autobiographical fictions and so this 'real' autobiography naturally raises some interesting responses. Vincent O'Sullivan, in his *New Zealand Listener* review, put it like this:

The title Janet Frame has chosen for her own life sets up the simple paradox that an autobiography, that skilful genre that needs to appear so casual if it is to ring true, must always *seem* like a journey one looks back on. Yet it is not quite like that at all. Self-depiction in itself becomes a form of fiction, selecting the traces and hints and anticipations to make the reader accept that yes, to have arrived here is inevitable. But in any life story there is an imposed sense of order which goes against the flow of experience as it occurred. Travelling to where one is, is where one has been all the time.

Murray Edmond's comment was that 'this deceptively simple book, ostensibly about Frame's typically New Zealand childhood, is really for me, but a literary sleight of hand, a book about writing'.

This volume, which takes Frame's life up until her departure for Dunedin Teacher's College in 1942, is due to be followed by a second, *An Angel at My Table*, this year. *To the Is-land* won the Wattie Book Award for 1983.

There were two biographies of important New Zealand writers. One, *Walking on My Feet, A.R.D. Fairburn 1904-1957: A Kind of Biography* (Collins) by James and Helen McNeish, is a large format, illustrated publication with an accompanying text which links material from various sources in a quick-fire note-form style — as insensitive pastiche-text, according to Katherine Mansfield's biographer, Antony Alpers, when he reviewed this book. The other is a good deal more productive. It is *James K. Baxter: A Portrait* (Port Nicholson Press), by W.H. Oliver, poet and historian, and a personal friend of Baxter. As befits such a book, the poetry is placed at the centre of Baxter's life and the details arranged around that core. This emphasis clears away, or at least places in perspective, the various roles that Baxter the man adopted through his lifetime — as Oliver lists them, 'the father, the showman, the drunk, the philanderer, the agitator, the husband, the parent, the householder, the civil servant'. As a discussion of the poet and the man this study is sensitive and just; although always keeping a critical distance away from the mythology that built up around Baxter, that honesty finally allows a real admiration for both the poems and the poet to be apparent. The photographs of seminal landscapes and the reproduction of other material add further and considerable strength to the book.

Three novels, in particular, need to be mentioned. Maurice Gee has completed his trilogy about the Plumb family with *Sole Survivor* (Faber/Penguin). Raymond Sole, grandson of George Plumb and a journalist, is, as expected, the narrator for his generation's history, retelling the past and recording the present. But equally at the centre of this novel is the unexpected, although depressingly familiar figure of Douglas Plumb, son of Willis and Mirth, Ray's cousin. *Sole Survivor* is about the relationship between these two from their childhood in Loomis and Peacehaven through to their respective adult careers; Duggie is a rising political star in the National Party. The present reality that Gee depicts is grim. Unscrupulous amorality makes for political success, social values are rejected by those who seek alternative lifestyles, and greed, selfishness, apathy, drunkenness and degradation are characteristic of those who remain with the mainstream of society. Sudden and violent death is

a commonplace in this particular world, and the ideals of natural beauty and intellectual endeavour that George Plumb sought after have no place there, are hardly even recalled. Duggie's death, just as he has manipulated himself into the position of becoming the leader of the Party, is by an avenger's bullet. Ray is the survivor. But the questions remain: will the ordinary, fallible human qualities that Ray possesses always be sufficient to ensure survival in such a world, and even so, is survival there worth it?

The two other novels are both by women. *Paddy's Puzzle* (Heinemann) is Fiona Kidman's third novel; she has also written a volume of short stories and two of verse. This time, the setting is wartime Auckland and Paddy's Puzzle is the boarding house where a splendidly exotic group of characters have made their home. It is about Clara Bentley's life among these people, about her upbringing in Hamilton, and about the resolution of the things in the approaching meeting with her eldest sister, Winnie. It's a good novel; better, I think, than Elizabeth Smither's *First Blood* (Hodder and Stoughton). Smither is an established poet and this fictional account of a factually-based murder is a new direction for her. She has also written a children's story and a further book of verse (see below). And while dealing with women's fiction, Victoria University Press has capitalised on the current interest in Janet Frame by publishing her own selection of her short stories, some previously uncollected, called *You Are Now Entering the Human Heart*. It's a welcome collection; a bibliography would have been handy.

Smither is one of three woman poets who have produced fresh work in 1983. Hers is *Shakespeare Virgins* (AUP/OUP), a collection of well-crafted short lyrics. The others are Lauris Edmond's *Catching It* (OUP) and Rachel McAlpine's *Recording Angel* (Mallinson Rendel). These three writers, along with Kidman, form something of a group both in their concerns — for women, for human and domestic detail — and in a coincidental geographical closeness. Smither lives in New Plymouth; the other three live in Wellington.

Three first books of verse to note are *The Auckland Regional Transit Poetry Line* (Hawk Press/Brick Row, 1982) by Roger Horrocks, *The Palanquin Ropes* (Voice Press) by Mike Johnson, and *After a Life in the Provinces* (Lindon Publishers) by Terry Locke. In this case all three men are from Auckland and, again coincidentally, it's possible to discern common stylistic features, at least in each poet's willingness to explore the new territory granted by post-modernism. Horrocks's and Johnson's books both consist of a single sequence.

Down south, two Dunedin poets have produced further verse. Brian

Turner's *Listening to the River* (John McIndoe) follows two earlier books, the first of which, *Ladders of Rain*, was joint winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, while Bill Sewell's second volume is *Wheels Within Wheels* (McIndoe). Neither of these poets could be confused with either of the groups mentioned above; both, and especially Turner, can be seen in the context of an Otago pattern which uses more traditional forms and concerns itself with the natural environment.

By grouping these poets in these ways — to simplify, Wellington women writing about family, house, garden, Auckland men writing an academic poetry, Otagoans concerned with tradition and environment — I have no wish to impose any rigidity on the New Zealand poetic scene. Exceptions will be found readily enough, both in the output of these poets, and by pointing to other poets whose product doesn't coincide with any regionalist theory of New Zealand writing. Nevertheless, to go no further, local ways of saying have taken root in the literature we call New Zealand.

In the dramatic literature, a 1982 publication — not available until 1983 — takes pride of place: *Collected Plays* (Oxford) by James K. Baxter, edited by Howard McNaughton. Its publication has sparked off a re-evaluation of Baxter as playwright and of his place in the history of New Zealand theatre. This edition makes it clear that Baxter's work in this field has been greatly underrated.

In criticism, there has been an addition to the Oxford New Zealand Writers' series — James Bertram's monograph, *Dan Davin*. Meanwhile Longman Paul has instituted a series on New Zealand writers aimed largely at the secondary school market and a general readership. It was founded under the general editorship of Peter Smart who contributed *Introducing Sam Hunt* and *Introducing Alistair Campbell*. Other writers so far dealt with have been Maurice Gee, Katherine Mansfield, James K. Baxter, Denis Glover and Bruce Mason. The aim has been to deal with the life as well as the art, and interesting photographs accompany the texts.

A substantial anthology has also been published by Oxford, and, in the established New Zealand tradition, it has provoked considerable debate. It is *The Oxford Book of New Zealand Writing Since 1945* chosen by MacDonald P. Jackson and Vincent O'Sullivan. It consists really of two anthologies, one of poetry and the other of short fiction (entitled 'prose'), along with two introductory essays on each topic; the poetry is treated by Jackson and the prose by O'Sullivan. These essays are good, and the bibliography full and reliable. The criticisms essentially make the charge that this post-war anthology of our 'writing' (but only poetry and short

fiction in fact) is a celebration of the generation of writers who came to maturity in the sixties and seventies. Therefore the representation of writers like Fairburn, Brasch and Curnow, all of whom produced major work before the end of the war, is unbalanced, while the treatment of the younger writers who arrive at the end of the period (1981-82) is cautious and, it is argued, forced into the thematic patterns established by the highlighted generation. Be that as it may, the anthology collects together in one place an impressive bulk of good writing.

Finally, a note on what is new in the journals and magazines. The first number of *The Journal of New Zealand Literature* (NZJL) has appeared with articles on contemporary literary activity, a select bibliography of criticism, and essays on general criticism. It will be published annually. *And*, on the other hand, is being limited to four issues. The first of these xeroxed collections of essays contains stimulating work from critics associated with the University of Auckland; perhaps the most interesting are Roger Horrocks's 'The Invention of New Zealand' and John Geraets' 'The New Zealand Anthology: Initiating an Archaeology'. *Parallax*, with whom some of the *And* writers are associated, has published its third number.

A trilogy completed, a major autobiography begun. I found the year stimulating and promising.

SIMON GARRETT

PAKISTAN

The President of Pakistan, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, in a couple of recent speeches stressed the development of Urdu as the national language, while recognising the role that English and Arabic must play in our national and international affairs. Writing in Urdu is flourishing, and an important event in Islamabad was the launching ceremony of Lt.-General K.M. Arif's book of verse, *Gard-i-Safar (Journey's Dust)*, published by Ferozsons.

1983 was perhaps the richest year ever for Pakistani letters. Zulfikar Ghose's South American saga continues in his fantastic novel, *Don Bueno* (Hutchinson), whose cyclic structure is sustained to the last with great powers of language and imagination. Bapsi Sidhwa, whose earlier novel, *The Crow Eaters*, had drawn wide interest perhaps as an 'ethnic' novel, has written a novel away from the Parsi settings and legends; of life and

married love in the plains of Punjab (Lahore) and the rugged hills of the Pakistani northwest. *The Bride* (Cape) is Sidhwa's second published work. Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (Cape) drew mixed reactions. Indeed, with this survey Salman Rushdie makes his formal entry into the republic of Pakistani letters. Other commentators have been mentioning his work, but in view of Rushdie's family connections in Pakistan, his recent visits and statements of affiliation with the country, and — even more — with his latest Pakistani novel, *Shame*, it is time to take note of the protestations. All three of his published novels are in print. His work is widely read in this country — as an expatriate writer's — and is often germane to healthy discussion. Tariq Mehmood's *Hand on the Sun* (Penguin) was an unusual novel in the year, a picture of the Pakistani/Asian community in industrial England, such as we have rarely had. The author's first, it confirms the documentary trends that have of late been popular in fiction; but at times the *story* is too thin, the language too febrile or wooden to be the language of imagination. We shall await a second work by Mehmood. The Overlook Press in the United States have announced the re-publication of some of the earlier novels by Zulfikar Ghose, which is very good news.

Hanif Kureishi has earned a name for himself in the theatre world, and for a few years now his plays have been staged in England, where he lives. His earlier *Borderline* (Methuen) was followed in print last year by *Outskirts* and other plays (Calder). Only one volume of poetry appeared: *This Time in Lahore* (Vision). Alamgir Hashmi's fourth collection of poems. Hashmi also published a volume of criticism titled *Commonwealth Literature* (Vision).

Translation of literary works into English, from other Pakistani languages, is coming into its own. *Versions of Truth: Urdu Short Stories from Pakistan*, ed. Khalid Hasan and Faruq Hassan (Vikas), is a very worthy volume. It includes stories by Saadat Hasan Manto, Ghulam Abbas, Masood Ashar, Mohammad Hasan Askari, Ashfaq Ahmad, Shafiq-ur-Rahman, A. Hamid, Ahmad Nadim Qasmi, Masood Mufti, Intezar Hussain, Enver Sajjad, Abdul Rahman Siddiqui, Abdullah Hussain, Muhammad Umar Memon, Ibne Saeed, and Mohammad Saleem-ur-Rahman. Another fine volume was *Qadir Yar: Puran Bhagat*, translated into English by Taufiq Rafat (Vanguard). Apart from the first English translation of the minor nineteenth-century Punjabi epic, *Puran Bhagat*, the book also contains Athar Tahir's erudite introduction to Qadir Yar and the Punjabi tradition. Numerous magazines are also encouraging translation. *The Journal of South Asian Literature* (USA) published a special issue, *The Writings of Intizar Husain*, ed. Muhammad Umar Memon (Vol.

XVIII, No 2), which, in addition to the critical material, included thirteen short stories by Intizar Husain, in English translation. Anwer Enayetullah has also published a number of fine translations of Urdu fiction in *Pakistan Digest* and elsewhere. In the context of Urdu Literature studies, which must interact with English in Pakistan, there are two recent articles to note: 'Pakistani Urdu Creative Writing on National Disintegration: The Case of Bangladesh' by Muhammad Umar Memon, *The Journal of Asian Studies* (USA) XLIII 1 (Nov. 1983), pp. 105-27, and 'Urdu Literature from Prison: Some Reflections on the Writings of Pakistani Prisoners of War in India' by Sajida S. Alvi, *The Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* (Lahore) XIX 3, pp. 43-54.

In non-fiction, there are two books. *My Version: Indo-Pakistan War 1965* (Wajidalis), by General Mohammad Musa, gives a view of the war by the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army during the event, and it adds significantly to the corpus of writing on the subject. Tariq Ali's stimulating book, *Can Pakistan Survive?* (Penguin/Pelican), furthers the gloom thesis concerning the state-structure but properly notes: 'Where Pakistan has, however, been blessed is in its poets. Poetry has retained its vigour and political independence, when these qualities have disappeared in every other field of socio-political or cultural life' (p. 197).

While the older journals in the country now barely make an appearance during the year, new ones need to come forth. The University of Peshawar had the distinction last year of publishing *The Journal of the English Literary Club*, which contains some interesting critical and creative work, both by students and older writers.

The President of Pakistan has ordered the institution of several new prizes and awards for literature and scholarship; for example, the substantial awards given for books published in all Pakistani languages during 1947-81 on Mohammad Iqbal. Further, in November, an international congress on Mohammad Iqbal took place in Lahore on the poet-philosopher's 106th birth anniversary. The Academy of Letters in Islamabad awarded the Patras Bukhari Award to A.R. Tabassum for his book of short stories, *A Window to the East* (Vantage, 1981). An effort is being made to improve the climate for creative writing; for example, censorship on magazines was lifted in March 1983. Although colleges and universities had to remain closed for part of the academic year — for reasons beyond, it would seem, everyone's control — one must note the positive aspects. For example, the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission have been very active sponsoring language-teaching workshops and symposia, planning curricula, and re-organising the existing library system throughout the country. In fact, the President

himself ordered the creation of self-sufficient libraries in every major city and district headquarters.

Over-all, this year's work is indeed both excellent and plentiful. One has good reason to believe that it will continue.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

SOUTH AFRICA

1983 saw J.M. Coetzee consolidate his reputation as one of the most disturbing and visionary novelists of recent years. *Life and Times of Michael K*, which won the Booker award, is an allegory of a simple man in a war-torn South Africa of the near future. While the scenario of apocalypse has become almost a commonplace in contemporary fiction from this country, Coetzee's treatment of the questions of power and individual frailty have a dramatic and philosophic resonance that places his book in a category of its own. By subtly inverting the cherished liberal notion of the 'indomitability of the human spirit' (most critics have, however, chosen to see *Michael K* simply in terms of humanist ideology), Coetzee shows — as he did in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) — how rudimentary is any kind of freedom, how subject we are to the demands, first and foremost, of living in a body.

The fundamentals of human response and social restriction, of spiritual revaluation intimately tied to the specifics of water and bread, are also of course germane to Athol Fugard's imaginative terrains, and *Master Harold and the 'Boys'* (the text now made available by O.U.P.) continued to receive acclaim both in South Africa and abroad, while Fugard's *Notebooks* (Johannesburg: Donker) provides a fascinating insight into twenty years of playmaking in South Africa.

With Fugard coming under attack from certain marxist critics in this country as he was accorded enthusiastic attention in liberal theatre circles, several black playwrights continued to emphasise theatre as a weapon of revolutionary struggle. Though many of these plays are frankly naïve, Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth*, Kessie Govender's *Working-Class Hero* and *Woza Albert* (a collaborative effort) revealed something of the range and possibilities of a theatre committed to social change. At the same time, the white writer Stephen Gray (the racial labels seem 'inevitable') offered his one-woman play *Schreiner*, a perceptive portrait of the famous South African novelist, feminist and outspoken

critic of nineteenth-century Imperialism, whose classic *The Story of an African Farm* appeared exactly a hundred years ago in 1883.

To be a black writing in South Africa during the 1970s was almost a guarantee of publication, whereas 1983 seemed to herald the phase of the woman writer. Critical 'casebooks' appeared on Olive Schreiner and Pauline Smith (the latter's 'Karoo' stories were reissued), Ravan Press published *Lip: from Southern African Women* and Donker launched a 'Woman Writers Series' in which appeared volumes of short stories by Ellen Palestrant (*Nosedive and Other Writings*) and Sheila Roberts (*This Time of Year*), and a novel by Sheila Fugard on sexual liberation entitled *A Revolutionary Woman*.

'Miss' as well as 'Ms' is the subject of Douglas Livingstone's book of 'love' poems, *A Rosary of Bone*, which was first published in 1975 and has been reissued by David Philip with additional material. The volume includes tender lyrics, witty 'metaphysical' pieces, sensitive translations of Goethe, Luis de Góngora and José-Maria de Hérédia, as well as a side-swipe at 'D.H. Lawrence as Feminist' and (to quote a poker-faced Livingstone) a 'serious warning against the hazards of promiscuity':

Ashes to Ashes,
And Dust to Dust:
If the AIDS don't get you,
The Herpes must.

This latest Addendum
to VD Lore
Ends: 'Eros backwards
Equals sore.'

'Giovanni Jacopo Meditates (*On the Beatitudes of Fidelity*)'

A Rosary of Bone seems set to delight some and enrage others.

By contrast, first volumes of poetry by Jeremy Cronin (*Inside*) and Molefe Pheto (*And Night Fell*) return one to the grim details of the socio-political situation. Cronin was in 1983 released from Pretoria Central after serving a seven-year sentence under the Terrorism Act (he was found to be an active member of the A.N.C.) and has produced several impressive 'prison poems'. Pheto, a detainee in solitary confinement for almost a year, is also a meticulous documenter of day-to-day life in gaol and his work testifies to an iron determination in the cause of a free South Africa. Of a slighter nature is Don Mattera's *Azanian Love Song* (a collection reflecting the poet's time as a banned person), while Modikwe Dikobe's *Dispossessed* reveals this writer's talents to be less evident in

verse than in his seminal novel of Sophiatown life during the 1930s, *The Marabi Dance*, which was published ten years ago. Further variety in the poetry scene was provided by Peter Strauss' *Bishop Bernward's Door*, Don MacLennan's *Reckonings* and Ridley Beeton's *Tattoos*, collections in which the private poet predominates over his social counterpart.

A particularly promising first volume of short fiction is Njabulo S. Ndebele's *Fools and Other Stories*, the preoccupations being those of township life with a significant shift of emphasis from the concerns of Black Consciousness to those of class division within black society itself. It is, however, the motif of Black Consciousness which lends structural and thematic unity to Menán du Plessis' *A State of Fear*, a novel set against the background of the 'coloured' school boycotts of the early 1980s.

Of the other notable works to appear most were by established authors: Guy Butler's very readable second volume of autobiography, *Bursting Worlds*; Richard Rive's *Advance Retreat*, a collection of short stories; Sylvester Stein's *Second-class Taxi*, a satirical novel of the 1950s, and John Beaumont's *The Great Karoo* (originally entitled *The Tree of Yggdrasil*), both of these reissued in David Philip's Africasouth Paperback Series; and a new edition of James Matthews' *The Park and Other Stories*. Finally, academic interest centred on the purchase by the National English Literary Museum (N.E.L.M.) in Grahamstown of a valuable collection of Roy Campbell's manuscripts, including corrected drafts and page proofs of his hitherto unpublished study of Wyndham Lewis (written during the 1930s), most of his translations of Lorca's poetry and the holograph of his proposed 'bullbook' (all of this material will be incorporated into the multivolume and annotated *Collected Works of Roy Campbell*, the first two books of which are due to appear under the Ad. Donker imprint in 1984).

MICHAEL CHAPMAN